



Representative

Kathy Haigh

District 35

2002: A Crucial Legislative Session

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Committee assignments:

Education (*vice-chair*)

Rules

State Government

Transportation

Joint Committee on

Community Security

Joint Committee on

Veterans and Military Affairs

Joint Legislative Audit

and Review Committee



Dear friends and neighbors,

What a difference a few months can make. When the Legislature finally adjourned last July, practically everyone — citizens and lawmakers alike — believed that the 2002 legislative session would be about transportation, transportation, and more transportation.

America was at peace. It's true that our national economy was cooling off, and our state's economy was slowing after the rocket ride of the 1990s, but no one was talking seriously about a recession. Unemployment was a problem, particularly in certain industries and certain areas of the state, but nothing like today, when Washington's joblessness rate is at or near the top in the U.S.

All this changed, of course, on September 11, 2001. The immediate effects of that day's devastating terrorist attacks on America were massive: unthinkable loss of life in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania; property destruction in the billions; and a profound national sense of shock and grief.

In the weeks and months since September 11, however, we are experiencing wave after wave of aftereffects. Industries suffer; family wage jobs are lost; spending decreases, which threatens local communities and causes state revenues to shrink. And Washington, like most states, is suddenly facing huge budget deficits that no one could have reasonably predicted.

This is the terrain as we head into this short, 60-day session. Tough budget decisions must be made: what to cut, what to preserve. We need to seek ways to stimulate the economy and create jobs. We've got to strengthen the security of our communities and our state. We have a constitutionally decreed duty to maintain a healthy public school system. And yes, our gridlocked, deteriorating transportation infrastructure still cries out for attention.

Short legislative sessions like the one we're now in are usually low-key affairs. But I can't think of a session in many years during which so many significant issues have converged. Please stay in touch throughout this session and this year. You've authorized me to represent you in Olympia, and I'm grateful for that trust; but this year, even more than others, I need to know what you're thinking about the issues we'll be dealing with.

Sincerely yours,

Rep. Kathy Haigh

House forms anti-terrorism committee

I'm honored to have been asked to serve on the newly established House Select Committee on Community Security. The formation of the committee, which is charged with overseeing the state's anti-terrorism efforts, was one of the first actions taken by the new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.

We may never have to deal with attacks from within our own borders here in Washington. Certainly that's the hope we all share. But the September 11 attacks on America showed us clearly that we had better be ready to prevent or respond to any contingency. That's where this new, bipartisan committee will focus its attention.

The committee will be responsible for performing an inventory of the state's capacity to avert and respond to terrorist attacks, examining the preparedness of state and local law enforcement agencies, emergency response teams, and public health departments. Among its many tasks, the committee will:

- Review the safety of major transportation networks, energy facilities, border crossings, ports (air and sea), state buildings and public venues, and water and food production facilities;
- Ensure the state's ability to prevent or handle a possible bioterrorism attack;

- Consider changes to the state's criminal code designed to enhance the state's ability to fight terrorism;
- Support citizens who are called up to active military duty; and

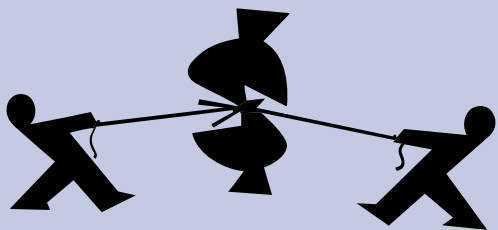
- Seek ways to increase security without abandoning our hard-won civil liberties.

I have been a member of the Select Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs for three years, and the background and knowledge that has given me should serve well on the new Community Security Committee. Also, as a veterinarian, I'm fortunate to have acquired a great deal of professional experience in the fields of public health and disease control. This is a critical time in America, and in Washington, and I'm grateful for the chance to contribute by serving on this committee.

In order to free up enough time to do the work the Community Security Committee will require in the coming months, I made the difficult decision to leave the State Government Committee. I enjoyed my work overseeing government agencies. We worked on the elections process, and on trying to create a more effective and efficient government with a focus on quality service to the public. I will continue to support these issues.



What happened to the operating budget?



Washington is facing its worst state budget outlook since the early 1990s. Estimates vary, but it's safe to say we're facing a budget deficit of about \$1.2 billion (out of a budget total of \$22.8 billion). That means budget cuts are inevitable, but after several years of tax cuts and budget trimming, there are no easy choices left; heart-wrenching decisions must be made.

I'm happy to see that Gov. Locke's budget proposal tries to shield the most vulnerable families from harm, but even with the best of intentions, it would require \$235 million in cuts to social services – including family services that will impact drug-affected babies, abused children, and the medically indigent. These aren't statistics. These are real children. Nursing home care and home care for seniors and the developmentally disabled also face reductions, as do our colleges and other priorities.

I don't welcome any of these cuts, and as the session progresses, I will continue to fight for the essential needs of Washington families. But there will be no way to avoid some of the hardest choices I've ever faced as your representative.

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Getting Washington moving again

As I said in my most recent newsletter, an effective solution to our state's transportation crisis was the biggest piece of unfinished business when the 2001 session adjourned last year. As bad as things were then, they've deteriorated even more in the last six months. Traffic is worse, there's a gaping hole in the state budget, and every year, congestion costs everyone in the state hundreds of dollars each – not to mention the billions of dollars in lost productivity skimmed right off the top of our state's economy.



The impact on the 35th district may not be as apparent as it is in the Snohomish/King/Pierce County corridor, but there is definitely an impact. There is a cost

to move goods all over the state, for instance, and we pay that "congestion premium" any time we buy those goods. Think about the ordeal we face any time we need to fly out of Sea-Tac International; the trip from home to the airport often takes longer than the flight itself. And finally, anyone who commutes by ferry knows the huge impact the transportation crisis is having on their lives. The fare hikes we've seen in the past year are just as much a part of the problem as a traffic jam on I-5.



The governor has unveiled a transportation plan to address our traffic congestion – a plan that is almost identical to the one that was essentially agreed to last summer, before House Republican negotiators were overruled by their party leaders. My prediction now is that something resembling this plan will pass in the Legislature this session, contingent on approval by voters across the state. If that is the case, I will provide as much information as possible, and I hope all citizens will consider this issue with a statewide perspective when they go to the polls.



In the meantime, we'll keep working for additional efficiencies in the way we spend our transportation dollars. This certainly isn't the whole answer to the transportation crisis, but regardless of what sort of revenue package is eventually adopted, efficiencies and streamlined permit processes will help us spend our tax dollars more wisely. I'm confident that this is also the goal of our new Secretary of Transportation, Doug McDonald.

Looking ahead for public schools

The school-accountability legislation I mentioned in an earlier newsletter remains one of my top priorities as vice-chair of the House Education Committee. It's not the **ONLY** goal, certainly, but until we put strong accountability procedures in place, education reform will continue to be stymied in our state. A federal accountability bill recently approved in Congress should serve as a useful template for our state legislation. As always, our goal is to bring all students up to high standards in our public schools.



What else? In addition to accountability, the education "to-do" list I brought out of the last session included, among other things:

- Reform the way we fund our public schools.
- Give the public the chance to vote on whether to keep the supermajority requirement for passing school levy and bond elections, or to return to a simple majority.
- Continue to ensure that Washington's teachers are the best in the profession.
- Increase parental and community involvement in our public schools.
- Make schools safer for our children.

While many things in the U.S. have changed in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing war, this to-do list hasn't. I still recognize that building a strong public school system and educating our state's children is the Legislature's "paramount duty." Based on my years as a school board member and my time in the Legislature, I still believe the outmoded, inefficient and unfair system we currently use for funding our public schools must be replaced with one that makes the best use of every dollar. I'm still convinced that real, effective education accountability will be a boon for students, educators and taxpayers alike. I still believe that getting parents and community members more involved in the activities of our schools can provide huge benefits to students. I still want our children to feel safe in the classroom and on the playground – not just from natural or man-made disasters, but from the bullying and malicious harassment that currently ruin the school experience for too many students.

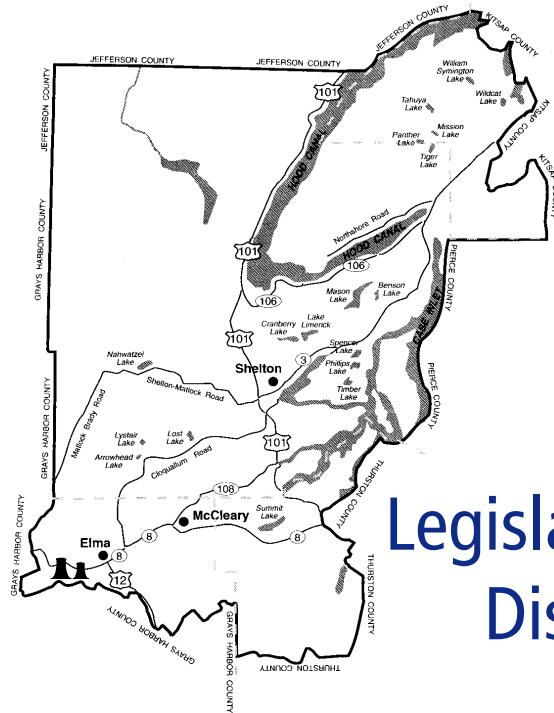
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Public Schools cont'd.

For years, school boosters have lamented the fact that school levy and bond elections can't succeed without at least a 60-percent approval by voters – unlike any other kind of election in our state. Because this is a constitutional issue, legislators can't decide this on their own. But we can take the steps needed to bring it to a statewide vote. I'm hopeful that this will be the session when we finally address this issue. And finally, I still think it's vital that we fulfill our commitment to the business community, and to our kids, to assure that our graduates have the knowledge and skills to compete in the new economy.

Of course, our greatest challenge in this economic climate will simply be to protect the hard-won gains that K-12 education has made in recent years. I have no doubt there will be lawmakers who want to balance a shaky budget on the backs of our schoolchildren. But the fact is, making smart investments in our kids and their schools is one of the most important things we can do for our economy and our quality of life here in Washington state. Now, more than ever, we need to remember our paramount duty.



**35th
Legislative
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